Co-Creation, Digital Art and Agency: Experiences from a Co-created Digital Artwork Project in Colombia

Co-creación, Arte Digital y Agencia: Experiencias de un proyecto de co-creación de obras de arte digital en Colombia

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Abstract. This article discusses processes of co-creation of digital art in the context of the Colombian armed conflict. The article situates these processes within a broader panorama of arts-based forms of conflict transformation, testimony and historical memory practices in the current 'memory boom' in Colombia, engaging with theorizations of victimhood and survivorhood. It then proceeds to dialogue with recent debates in Digital Humanities that have called for a broadening out of the discipline, indicating key issues in terms of (digital) artistic representation, and hypothesizes the potential that digital artistic methods can have for alternative forms of engagement and representation of traumatic experiences. The article then sets out the conceptualisation of the artistic approach underpinning the digital artwork in question: Voces invisibles: Mujeres Víctimas del Conflicto Colombiano, with a description of the co-creation methodologies followed by a presentation of the resultant artwork itself. The article reflects on the use of digital methods and transcreation through multimodal and multimedia practices to encourage sharing personal, social and collective issues, engaging the participants in exploring art practices in physical co-creative workshops with tailored methodologies and approaches.

Keywords: digital art, Colombian conflict, victimhood, survivorhood, digital humanities.

Resumen. Este artículo analiza el proceso de co-creación de una obra de arte digital en el contexto del conflicto armado colombiano. El artículo sitúa este proceso dentro de un panorama más amplio de experiencias artísticas dedicadas a para transformar, testimoniar o bien generar memoria sobre el conflicto. Todas estas prácticas son parte del actual "boom de la memoria" que se vive en Colombia y se involucran con la teorización sobre victimización y sobrevivencia. A continuación, este artículo establece un

dialogo con debates recientes de las Humanidades digitales que han exigido una ampliación de esta disciplina indicando cuestiones clave de representación artística digital. El articulo entonces hipotetiza sobre el potencial que los métodos artísticos digitales pueden tener para formas alternativas de compromiso y representación de experiencias traumáticas. A continuación, el artículo expone la conceptualización del enfoque artístico que sustenta la obra de arte digital en cuestión: Voces invisibles: Mujeres Víctimas del Conflicto Colombiano, con una descripción de las metodologías de co-creación seguidas de una presentación de la obra de arte resultante. El artículo reflexiona sobre el uso de métodos digitales y la transcreación a través de prácticas multimodales y multimedia para fomentar el intercambio de temas personales, sociales y colectivos, involucrando a los participantes en la exploración de prácticas artísticas en talleres físicos de co-creación con metodologías y enfoques adaptados.

Palabras clave: arte digital, conflicto armado colombiano, victimización, supervivencia, digital humanities.

The project and artistic interventions under discussion in this article were developed and implemented in the context of the armed conflict in Colombia, working with two groups of victims: Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres (RPM), and Corporación Zoscua. The Colombian armed conflict is, as scholars and human rights activists have frequently noted, one of the longest-running armed conflicts in the world; with its origins in the mid-1960s, it has seen to date an estimated more than half a million deaths, 60,000 forced disappearances (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2016, p. 14), approximately 7.7 million displaced peoples (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2018), and over 9 million victims in total[1]. Within this context, a significant number of responses to the armed conflict have arisen, both within the framework of the recent transitional justice processes within the country, which enshrined memory actions in law[2], and also in the large and vibrant body of work undertaken by civil society organisations across the country in documenting memory of the conflict, and in undertaking acts of resistance. Indeed, our project has learned from, and builds upon, a broad panorama of arts-based forms of conflict transformation, testimony and historical memory practices that characterise the current "memory boom" (Rios Oyola, 2015, p. 10) in Colombia, and which have implemented techniques such as storytelling, collaborative creation methodologies, and others. Many scholars have charted the rise of arts-based forms of conflict transformation in Colombia in recent years, and recent surveys have highlighted the value of such initiatives; Soriano Ruiz and Silveira Martins, in their systemic survey of civil society actions in Colombia that make use of artistic techniques for symbolic reparation, visibilisation of human rights violations, and peacebuilding, indicate how arts-based initiatives can function as alternative means of «la promoción de la paz y el empoderamiento de la sociedad civil». They illustrate that such arts-based approaches function to «reforzar el tejido social, sanar a través del arte y memorializar a las víctimas del conflicto armado colombiano», and can contribute to empowerment because they function as «un vehículo donde las personas pueden manifestarse a sí mismos/as, a partir de experiencias que superan lo meramente discursivo; experiencias que son interiorizadas» (Soriano Ruiz and Silveira Martins, 2018, p. 35).

Within this context in which collective storytelling and participatory arts practices have been increasingly undertaken as part of a process of coming to terms with the armed conflict in Colombia, a particular concern in the development of our project, and the resultant co-created artwork that we describe later in this article, is the notion of 'the victim' in itself. The issues of victimhood and agency have been raised by several scholars in recent years, both in general, and with regard to the Colombian conflict specifically. Madlingozi, studying the production of the category of "victim" within the context of transitional justice, has criticised the way in which certain types of victims are "produced", and argues that the production of victims is «an inherently voyeuristic or pornographic practice», since it «transforms the position of the 'victim' in his or her society and produces a language of victimization for him or her to speak» (Madlingozi, 2010, p. 208). Kieran McEvoy and Kirsten McConnachie in their analysis of the construction of victimhood in transitional societies, highlight the ways in which victims' voices and agency are realised, but also impeded and in some cases co-opted, in transitional justice, noting how «the voice and agency of victims is often both publicly and legally bound up both with the innocence of the victim» (2013, p. 494), and that the role of blame in the construction of victimhood

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[1] At the time of writing of this article, the total number of victims of all forms of violence related to the conflict registered in the Colombian government's Victims Registry stood at over 9 million (9,134,347; Unidad para la Atención y Reparación a las Víctimas, n.d.).

[2] With regard to legal frameworks, we are here referring principally to the 2011 Victims and Land Restitution Law (Law 1448), which, in addition to setting out a series of rights of victims, also set down a commitment to series of actions related to historical memory.

may «render victimhood contingent upon "blameless-ness", encourage hierarchies between deserving and undeserving victims and require the reification of bla-meworthy perpetrators» (2013, p. 504), as well as leading to processes that «risk (…) re-silencing victims negating their potential for agency and reproducing the sense of powerless» (2013, p. 498). Taking a different focus, but sharing similar concerns, Schwöbel-Patel, in her analy-sis of the ways in which victims are constructed in the International Criminal Court, notes how the very term "victim" itself «promotes an image of passivity», and ignores a «rich history of political activism and acts of resistance by victim and survivor groups», leading to an «immobilized and depoliticized victim» (Schwö-bel-Patel, 2018, pp. 713-714). Crucially, Schwöbel-Patel, argues, such "fictitious victim-witness" promotes «infan-tilized, feminized and racialized victim stereotypes», which draw on and reinforce typologies of imperialism (Schwöbel-Patel, 2018, pp. 704, 711); moreover, in ano-ther article, Schwöbel-Patel illustrates how this kind of stereotyping is problematic because it is «dependent on an understanding of victims as lacking agency» (Schwö-bel-Patel, 2016, p. 250).

With regard to Colombia specifically, Cadena-Ca-margo *et al*, in their study of how internally displaced women narrate their life stories, argue that there are constant struggles between victimization and agency in their narratives, and conclude that «the dichotomy of labeling as victims or agents/ survivors remains incom-plete» (Cadena-Camargo *et al*, 2019, p. 13). Sanne Weber, meanwhile, discussing the implementation of the Vic-tims' Law in Colombia, critiques what she sees as the "victim-peacemaker binary" for not offering a nuanced and complex understanding of women's subjectivities and roles, arguing that «a focus on victimhood affords women rights on the basis of their –sexual– vulnera-bility, while a focus on motherhood risks reinforcing patriarchal stereotypes about women's gendered role in society» (Weber, 2018, p. 102), and concludes that nei-ther of these are helpful in transforming structural gen-dered inequality, since the binary is reductive, and dimi-nishes the multiple forms in which women have social and economic agency.

That said, not all have rejected outright the use of the term "victim" in a Colombian context. Paula Medi-na García, in her analysis of the impact of violence against women of Afrocolombian descent during the armed conflict, proposes instead reworking the term itself, rejecting essentialising and paternalist notions of victimhood, and instead advocating an understanding of the «active victim-subject» (Medina García, 2018, p. 320). Similarly, Nadia Tapia Navarro has recently analy-sed how the group Movice deploys the category of "vic-tim" to verbalise an alternative narrative of the armed conflict, adopting and using this term "from below", and infusing it with new meanings, as well as «challeng[ing] the stereotype according to which victims are necessari-ly passive, defenceless and docile» (Tapia Navarro, 2019, pp. 291-292).

What can be drawn from all of these scholars is the importance of deconstructing the notion of the victim as passive object on whom violence is perpetrated. Instead, it is important to give victims agency, both through the processes of creation themselves, and also through the resultant artwork, in terms of its visual, sonic, and digital aspects. In the project and resultant artwork that we have developed, we thus engaged with this proble-matisation of the victim as passive, and have attempted to develop methods and artistic forms that provide for more agency for the participants. In so doing, we argue, we are responding to recent calls by scholars within Digital Humanities who have advocated a re-thinking of the discipline, to embrace digital culture, and also to engage with ethical, social, and political issues. For ins-tance, in their recent manifesto for #transformDH, Bai-ley *et al* have argued that we need a «digital humanities that will center on the intersection of digital production and social transformation through research, pedago-gy, and activism», proposing a call to action to «actively seek a more transformative Digital Humanities: a Digital Humanity that explicitly names the radical potential of doing scholarship with and about the digital, a DH that addresses the most pressing social justice concerns of our day» (Bailey *et al*, 2016, p. 72).

Similarly, Losh *et al*, members of the FemTechNet collective, have called for «putting the human back into the Digital Humanities» (Losh *et al* 2016, p. 92); building on Tara McPherson's observations regarding the more conservative DH traditions which lead scholars to ignore ethical and cultural dimensions, they argue that:

> digital humanities is presented with an rich opportu-nity to lead academic change in gender/women's studies, media studies, and elsewhere –not just at the technical level, but at theoretical and social levels as well– but it needs to be an intersectional feminist digital humanities in order to do so (Losh *et al*, 2016, p. 93).

These various calls for the re-thinking of Digital Humanities – which include the call to widen out our conceptualisation of the discipline to embrace digital culture, to engage with social transformation, and to lead to change – serve as an inspiration for our project and the co-created digital artwork that we have develo-ped, alongside the many inspiring collaborative arts-ba-

sed projects already undertaken by community groups across Colombia. Indeed, this notion of an "intersectional feminist digital humanities" is a notion which underpins our project and the resulting digital artwork that we describe.

The ways in which we propose to address this call to action to re-think Digital Humanities lie in proposing an intervention which is at the nexus of the issues outlined above: that is, we propose an intervention which brings together the debates about arts-based responses to conflict, and the theorisations of victimhood and agency as noted above, with theories arising from digital culture, in particular digital agency. That is, we explore in this article and in the artwork itself how the potentials of digital technologies which have so often been documented by digital culture theorists – such as the possibility for non-linear representations, non-classic narratives, and more active participation from the viewer – can be employed to afford greater interaction and agency. The co-created artwork, to be described below, is based on a hypothesis that a creative use of digital technologies can offer significant opportunities for participants in creating more open and agential forms of representation. Scholars have since the early 1990s debated how digital technologies can offer ways of reworking some of the more conventional narrative structures: from the first debates as early as Bolter (1991), Moulthrop (1991) and Landow (1992), scholars have indicated how digital technologies can offer a potential transformation of the role of the author/artist and the role of the reader/spectator, whereby the reader/spectator takes on a more active role. Similarly, scholars have also commented on how digital technologies allow for transformations in the structure of a narrative; instead of a conventional, linear narrative that is commonly associated with print formats, digital technologies, through hyperlinking, animations and visualisations, can present stories in non-linear formats. Building on this, and thinking through these issues as they relate to representation of victims, we argue that these new digital forms of communication – which allow for a nonlinear, non-classic narrative, for user input and modification – may have more to offer than the more conventional classic art or narrative forms. We do not, in saying this, mean to fall into technological determinism, and to suggest that digital technologies in and of themselves always provide greater agency, or always disrupt linear narrative. Rather, taking on board Murray's caution that «activity alone is not agency» (Murray, 1997, p.128), and Ciccorico's distinction of "responsibility" from "power" (Ciccorico, 2007, p. 9), along with the observations of many other scholars who have cautioned against associa-

ting digital technologies with empowerment *per se* (see Aarseth 1997, p. 14; Hayles, 2008, p. 31; Bell, 2010, p.12), we propose that these technologies, when combined with co-creation methodologies and with sufficient attention and thought, can be employed productively to aim to give more agency to participants. Thus, if scholars have critiqued the one-dimensional narrative of victimhood as reductive, we explore in this article and the resultant artwork how co-creation methods and digital technologies can come together to disrupt this model.

The co-creation workshops themselves took place during one week in October 2019, and were held in a small community centre in Bogotá, the capital city of Colombia, with women participants from two victims'/survivors' groups in Colombia, these being the Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres (RPM), and Corporación Zoscua. In terms of the two groups participating, the RPM originated in 1996, in response to a series of violent massacres which took place in Urabá, a region in northwest Colombia, perpetrated by the paramilitary group, Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urubá. Feminist activists mobilized to organize a protest march to Urubá, with more than 2,000 women participating in what was to become the Ruta's first national march. At present, the RPM comprises women representatives of 300 organizations, encompassing approximately 10,000 women in 142 municipalities, across 18 *departmentos* [administrative regions].

Corporación Zoscua, meanwhile, is a much smaller, grassroots activist group within Colombia. Founded in 2007, Zoscua represents victims and the families of victims within one specific region [*departamento*] of the country, this being Boyacá, one of the 32 departments of Colombia, and located within the mountains of the Eastern Cordillera of the Andes. Taking its name from the Muisca language – one of the 65 indigenous languages recognized in Colombia – this organisation aims to promote «actions of resistance to oblivion, injustice, violence and authoritarianism» (Corporación Zoscua 2019, p.2) and has, since its foundation, undertaken a number of activist and artistic interventions, including installations and exhibitions, often working in conjunction with other organisations.

In terms of the workshops themselves, as a creative and also (partially) therapeutic week-long process of co-creation, it was important in terms of the design and methodology of the co-creation workshops to bear in mind how the dynamics of such a space could best be managed in order to avoid re-victimising the women participants. In our design, we were informed by recommendations arising from women's activist groups in Colombia themselves, particularly the RMP itself, espe-

cially their recent publications *La verdad de las mujeres* (2013) and *Corazón, cuerpo y palabra* (2017). In their 2013 report the RPM set out a series of recommendations for undertaking memory work with women victims, advising that «Los procesos de memoria no deberían focalizarse solo en el horror vivido sino también en recordar, visibilizar y dignificar la capacidad y creatividad de las mujeres víctimas del conflicto para resistir» (Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, 2013, p. 102). Similarly, in their 2017 publication, the RPM reinforce the importance of memory work focussing not on the past horror, but on creativity and the possibility of resistance, recommending that «Las labores de las memorias implican además de un trabajo creativo desde el presente, el encuentro con otros y con otras. (…) Si esa persona comparte vivencias similares, surgirá un vínculo de identificación que puede construir una *comunidad afectiva*» (Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, 2017, p. 26), noting that such a pedagogy of memory «permite abrir futuro al pasado, asumiéndolo inacabado; como un fondo de experiencia al cual se puede recurrir desde un presente dinámico y vivo» (Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, 2017, pp. 27-28).

Building on and learning from the expertise of the activist groups themselves in the co-creation methodologies they have devised for working with victims/survivors, and implementing their recommendations, we thus devised a methodology for the co-creation workshops which would, as far as possible, enable these workshops to take place without further re-victimising the women participants. Firstly, this involved a consideration of the setting: we chose for the co-creation workshop not an official, state-sponsored space – which could potentially have connotations for any families of victims of state violence –, nor a university space – with its implications of expert knowledge being imparted to learners, and its resultant hierarchy of knowledge –. Instead of such top-down spaces, we selected a local community casa within one of the quieter neighbourhoods of Bogotá, run by local residents, and which routinely holds locally run events, activities, such as yoga sessions, community activities, and so forth.

Secondly, we set up a safe space outside the main community room where the co-creation activities were taking place; in this side room, the women participants could take a break, have a drink or snack, and take some time out of the memory work whenever necessary.

Thirdly, we wove moments of reflection into the week, in particular, through an opening ritual where researchers and participants gathered together as equals to weave our stories together through a mandala made out of wool whose loops represented our stories and connections, and a closing ritual in which this same mandala was planted into a plant pot, upon which a plant was sewn, symbolising the growth of the new based on the memories. Fourthly, we ensured that the women were supported by having leaders from the two groups to which they belonged at the workshop, so making sure they had a familiar face should they need additional support.

Fifthly and finally, a crucial way in which we aimed to ensure that the women participants did not focus solely on the pain of their memories was the process of exteriorising these memories through artistic and hands-on co-creation. That is, activities were designed such that participants focused on the activities, such as drawing, painting, cutting, sewing and weaving, and, in this process, memories emerged, rather than the participants being forced to concentrate on the memory itself. Here, we built upon the recommendations that the RPM, as noted above, has provided on collaborative artistic creation, aiming to focus on creativity, rather than on the traumatic events themselves.

Building on all of the above, the co-creation workshops were thus designed to give voice to the women victims who were participating and construct a collective memory – a memory where they felt represented. The workshops functioned as a medium for creating and collecting materials for a documentary website and an interactive digital artwork, *Voces Invisibles: Mujeres Víctimas del Conflicto Colombiano* for which we explored alternative forms of representation of victimhood which are victim-centric –drawing on the findings of Medina García and Navarro noted above– primarily through storytelling and multimodal and mixed-media creative practices.

Thus, the resulting digital artwork explores the potential of digital technologies through multimodality, non-linear representations, and non-classic narratives, and, moreover, in a way in which the women could understand and interact with their different literacies. We posed a series of research enquires starting with how digital technologies could help to make visible the voices of the women victims; concurrent with this we explored the opportunities that co-creative practices could provide as methodology for collaboration between artist and community with the aim of making the participants agents of change, as well as a co-creation as a method for gathering materials and knowledge through sharing.

Here, we learnt from recent work on arts-based methods in community research. In their scoping review which drew out the findings of twenty years of arts-based methods in community research, Sara Coemans and Karin Hannes found that there were several predomi-

nant rationales for implementing arts-based methods, including how such methods could be used to:

> overcome power imbalances between researcher(s) and the subject being researched, by conducting research with participants rather than on them, noting how such research attempts to 'give a voice to their participants' and 'facilitate richer reflection and dialogue'. Moreover, they also note that arts-based methods can be particularly useful when working with more vulnerable groups, and also in being able to explore 'more complex or sensitive issues' (Coemans and Hannes, 2017, p. 40).

Bearing in mind these findings, we aimed to develop more participant-driven forms of engagement, based on co-creation. The notion of co-creation, like co-design or participatory design, is engaged with the idea of placing the user at the centre of the design community within the spectrum of a human-centred core, thus «broadening beyond the traditional user-centred core, in which users were passive objects of study and researchers used traditional methods of science to describe the status quo in people's lives» (Sanders and Stappers, 2014, p. 1). The application of this methodology in the workshops allowed the participants to share and work together from their own perspectives towards a common goal with the guidance of the artist researcher but with their contributions being at the forefront of the research development and final outputs (fig. 1 and fig. 2). Thus, we invited the group to explore how hybrid artistic practices including physical/analogue and digital could facilitate new forms of audio-visual representations.

Our documentary website resulted in a detailed research project which allowed its participants to voice their experience through a clear set of goals and research questions; to showreel the creative process of the workshops, methods, participation, and media used; and to thereby create a work of digital art which also allowed for the addition of personal stories in a mobile application, which we will describe below.

To find more tailored methods designed in response to this specific context, we liaised with the Colombian local impact coordinator who had already worked with some of the women and who were happy to contribute to this mixed-media and multimodal production. The women also participated in meetings, events, and interviews with the wider research team before the co-investigator/artist designed the workshops, which helped understand how best to interact with them – largely through asking the right questions in a manner they would find them relevant to their experiences –. It was important that these interactions were couched in language for the lay person to understand the work's aim and scope, as well as their significance as agents of change.

Integral to the nature of this work was to provide a transparent approach to create a safe environment and to build trust. Thus, the next step was to involve the research group in discussions to provide participants with a programme of activities for them to choose from. This was important due to the mixed abilities and literacies among the group.

This method of co-creation was a significant part of the process because it allowed the women to become more invested in the study; instead of being passive providers of information to be used by an artist, they took an active role in deciding how they wanted their stories

Fig. 1. Co-creation of a map of Colombia using material and threads. All photographs taken by the research team in 2019.

Fig. 2. Co-created mini-museum created by one of the participants in the workshop.

to be told. The artist/researcher acted as a facilitator in the design process, conceived of as open design; as Bas van Abel *et al.* put it, «open design is based on a libertarian relationship between designers and potential users, and not on a rational one in which the designer is seen as superior» (2011, p. 172). In this way, through open design, a more egalitarian relationship was established, with the women having greater agency in the process.

Within this space of open design and co-creation, we worked with life-stories and story-based communication, as Pip Hardy, Tony Sumner and Joe Lambert have significantly used in their storytelling practice, as well as exploring creative approaches and processes, individual and in groups, using multimodal communication through visual, audio, writing and performance practices. The participants were encouraged to bring materials and through user-generated processes we gathered photographic material; also, the artworks women created in the workshops in the form of audio, visual and written materials became part of both the digital art and the website.

In particular, we borrowed from methodologies in digital storytelling, which we adapted to the context. Here, we built on the work of Lambert and others, who have been working extensively with the practice of digital storytelling. Founder of the Centre for Digital Storytelling (now StoryCentre), Lambert's methods highlight the value of personal stories for learning and awareness. With particular focus on first-person voice, process, participation, and multimedia production, StoryCentre proposes a range of methods which they identify under the umbrella of StoryWork. This involves «working closely with workshop participants to ensure that the social and political determinants of individual 'experience' are brought out, in their stories» (StoryCentre, 2016-2017, p. 2) From the studies they have carried out, they believe that using storytelling to express sensitive topics that might have stigmas such as discrimination, victimisation or mental health issues, help to contextualise the issue or problem and this is where change happens. We adapted this approach to our project, where for instance, the women felt unheard and by being able to identify their lack of representation in the Colombian conflict and find ways to make their voice heard, it made a difference to them.

Storycentre also highlight the following:

Sharing stories can lead to positive change. Personal narratives can touch viewers deeply, moving them to reflect on their own experiences, modify their behaviour, treat others with greater compassion, speak out about injustice, and become involved in civic and political life. Whether online, via social media, in local communities, or at the institu-

tional/policy level, the sharing of stories has the power to make a real difference (Storycentre, 2016-2017, p. 3).

Women taking part in *Invisible Voices* were highly active about their rights and political life and spoke candidly, as well as, with passion, anger and pain, about the injustice they and other women had suffered during the Colombian armed conflict. In their feedback they identified as one of their goals, to make a "real difference", one of the reasons why they like to take part in workshops to help other women, gain strength and continue their fight for those they love and for a change in society in general.

Other areas where storytelling is being used very successfully is in healthcare. Hardy and Sumner explore how storytelling as a reflective process, can cause a change in health and mental issues, noting that:

Powerful personal stories promote reflection, prompt discussion and debate, highlight opportunities for learning and improvement, encourage the cultivation of empathy and compassion, and remind all those engaged in the business of healthcare of our shared humanity (Hardy and Sumner, 2018, p. XVIII).

Again, the above informed our methodology for *Invisible Voices*. We started the co-creation workshops with an activity where women were invited to bring an object and express their experiences of the Colombian conflict through this object (fig. 3 and fig. 4). This exercise provoked extremely personal testimonies loaded with overwhelming emotion and felt with empathy, and group discussions from which to learn and reflect. In their feedback women told us that they found that sharing these first-person stories through collaborative creative projects helped them to heal, increased their self-esteem, made them feel more empowered and that they were taking part in Colombia's historical memory.

Through the methodology described above, we then created a series of digital outcomes of the project, these consisting of a documentary website, digital artwork and a mobile application used to collect stories. The following paragraphs now describe the website, digital artwork, and mobile application, with particular focus on the user experience and input.

The website follows the research process through slide shows with photographs of the workshops, installations, audio stories generated from the objects the participants were invited to bring as a starting point. This created powerful stories which can be heard in Spanish (with English translation in format pdf), with titles such as *Proud of Being Black*, *When I was 11 Years Old*, *Heal and Save*, *Signification of the Bandana*, *My Little Children*, *Deep Pain*, *Will carry on Flighting*, *Accept I Was*

Fig. 3. Symbolic object brought by one of the participants in the workshop.

Fig. 4. Symbolic object brought by one of the participants in the workshop.

a Victim, *Displacement and Lost Son;* as well as videos documenting the process of the workshops with titles including *Let Me Refresh Your Memory*, *Threading Memories*, *Listen to Us!*, *Their Place Within Memory*, *Our Bodies Were Left in Threads* and *A Museum for Me.*

Regarding the terms of use of the website, the rights of the contents belong to their authors and can only be used by third parties with their prior authorization. The objectives of this website are to present the results produced by the project and to make women victims of the armed conflict in Colombia visible to society. Consequently, it is expected to contribute significantly to the awareness of society about women victims, and to propose new ways of representing them. In terms of target audience, the work is addressed to all the social actors involved in the problem and not only to the women voices of the conflict themselves. In other words, it is also aimed at social groups including NGOs, associations, political representatives, academia, and the general public. Moreover, plans are in place for the development of educational materials for secondary school level pupils in Colombia based on the contents of the website.[3]

The interactive digital art *Voces Invisibles* consists of three parts:

1. *Their Place Within Memory*, reflecting the memory space, personal and collective memory, represented by the activity in the Writing on the Wall.
2. *Do You Hear Us?* represents the political activist space with photographs of events organized by the women.
3. *Voices Constructing Memory* has a variety of narrations gathered from the workshop with themes including participation in political activism and culture, issues of power, territory, displacement, violence, and gender representation such as *A Museum for Me*; body politics with *Our Body was Left in Shreds*; historical and personal memory: *I Refresh your Memory, Writing on the Wall,* and *Threading Memories* (fig. 5 and fig. 6).

In terms of user interaction with the digital artwork, users need to engage in a process of discovery by rolling the mouse over what at first sight looks like a white blank screen. It is with this interaction that they will be able to unravel small animations depicting the making process of activities developed in the workshops, including the object's storytelling audio clips. We have used this digital aesthetics of opaque and transparent movie clips in an interface initially devoid of content as a metaphor for the invisibility of the women's voices which only come to life when the user caresses the screen with the mouse. Additionally, there are stripes at the top and bottom of the screen, of poignant and meaningful messages in Spanish and English moving across the screen when the users activate the screen through their participation. The colours selected for each part are significative of the issues in question such as the writing on the wall in black and white; the Colombian flag colours for the political activist stage and green and brownish earth colours to represent their stories representing change and hope for a better world.

In addition to this interactive work, we also developed an interactive mobile application, entitled *Mujeres Voces Invisibles del Conflicto* (MVIC) (fig. 7 and fig. 8). Through the use of this application, women can share their stories in writing, orally or through video, during and after the workshops following a system that preserves anonymity and confidentiality of the stories, thus

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[3] These education materials are current in development and will be piloted at the next stage of the project.

Fig. 5. Co-creation of jute material with slogans by participants in the workshop.

Fig. 6. Finalised jute material with slogans by participants in the workshop.
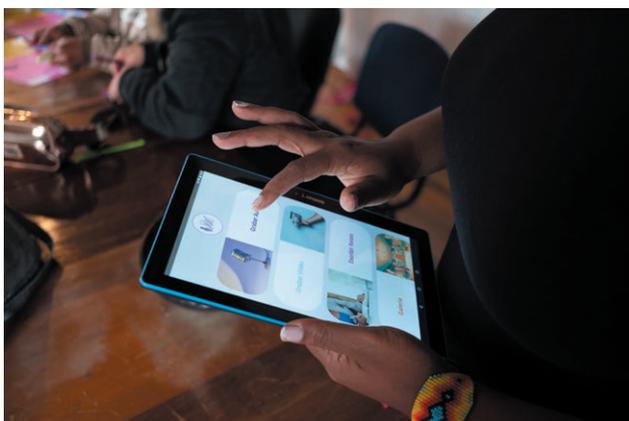
**Fig. 7.** The application, Mujeres Voces Invisibles del Conflicto (MVIC).
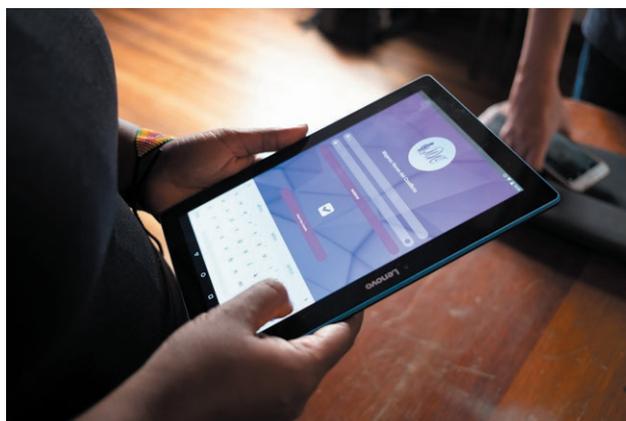
Fig. 8. The application, Mujeres Voces Invisibles del Conflicto (MVIC).

providing a space of privacy and security where the women involved in the project can leave their stories as an alternative and complement to the workshops. This means that the digital artwork is not a static or fixed work, but, instead, is ongoing, responding to new content as shared by the women; the artwork is thus open-ended, and gives greater agency and co-authorship of the artwork to the women. In this way, the design and development of the application was conceived of as a further way to help avoid presenting the women as passive objects of study, but instead, provide them with agential forms of contribution.

Regarding the security of the application, user registration was made by invitation, in order to avoid receiving fake testimonials from people not belonging to this group of women. During this process, personal data is never saved but each user was identified by a randomly

generated code. In this sense, all the stories are saved encrypted so that only those who are authorized have access (authors and creators of the work). Participants can only access their own contents whereas the designers of the application can access all contents but cannot know the identity of the participants of any of the stories. Moreover, if a participant wants to delete any of her contributions, including their account, they can do so without leaving any kind of trace. Both the application and the artwork are accessible through the menu in the documentary website.

These digital outputs have helped to analyse and disseminate community research in a multimodal way making it accessible for a variety of readers. Most importantly, documenting the digital stories that this particular community of women created in the workshops through multimodal and multimedia practices and using a trans-

creation approach[4] which is reflected in the documentary website (through the exploration of ideas, concepts and issues drawn from their experiences in various media and forms, as a group) allows for a more inclusive understanding and experience of the artwork and consequently healing. According to Ahmed and Siddiqi, «the communicative and personal nature of creative expression, accentuated through collective arts activities, can forge social bonds while supporting identity formation and cultural transmission. The power of the group transcends the sum of individual efforts» (Ahmed and Siddiqi, 2006, p. S26).

In this way, learning both from scholars working on storytelling in international contexts, and from recommendations of Colombia-specific initiatives, particularly those of the RPM itself, the process of co-creation aimed to foreground agency. The co-creation workshops thus made the research team reflect on the possibilities that co-creative digital art practices can have to foster peace with oneself, with the society where one feel under-represented or not at all, and the healing aspect that co-creation might engender, from the sympathy gained through sharing stories and co-creating. Having their stories published and exhibited online, has allowed the participants to take ownership and control over the work, seeing themselves represented.

An important part of this co-creative approach was a series of follow-ups, including questionnaires, and a participatory *taller de devolution*[5] held online in Cali in November, in which participants were shown the resultant online project and asked if they wanted to make any further contributions.

In their responses, several key themes came to the fore. These included firstly, emotive responses to the act of artistic creation in a collective space, with Participant E highlighting, for instance, how it moved her, and noting «la emoción y la alegría de ver tu obra de arte hecha realidad y digo mi obra de arte, porque así lo siento»[6]. Also evident in this response is a second key issue,

this being the issue of authorship; as we can see from the phrasing that the participant uses, she feels that this is *her* work of art – an example of the shared agency that can be fostered through digital co-creation –.

Thirdly, many of the participants highlighted the importance of *visibilidad* [Visibility], and of «esta labor de construcción de memoria de manera artística que contribuya a una reparación simbólica y restaurativa» (Participant E). The digital artwork thus clearly has added to their experience as creators of the work by seeing it represented online, and the co-creation methodology has functioned as a participatory exercise to empower these women.

Fourthly, and perhaps more importantly, all participants highlighted the healing aspects of the co-creative artistic process; Participant A recommends «que se siga replicando y sea una herramienta más para que las mujeres víctimas sigan sanando», and Participant C highlights that through this process «he podido fortalecerme y continuar mi lucha por saber la verdad, así que veo muchos de estos sentimientos reflejados en los resultados del proyecto». Participant A felt that «al activar y comunicar con todos los sentidos el aspecto de sanación es más intenso y asertivo», and whilst Participant B felt that such activities «ayudan pues las víctimas se dan cuenta en estos encuentros que son muchas familias que viven tragedias similares y ayudan a hacer catarsis». Participant C described how, when engaged in the hands-on activities, including weaving, working with plaster cast, and sewing, «nos reunimos todos y estuvimos pendientes de hacer esas actividades y allí logré plasmar mis sentimientos de dolor y entender que no estaba sola y que valía la pena continuar». Still others highlighted the important healing effects of doing these activities not as solo pieces of artistic creation, but as collective endeavours, such as Participant D describing the experience as «curador, acogedor, cuando después de escuchar a alguien, prosiguen los abrazos y las palabras de aliento». Finally, Participant E highlighted the fact that:

el arte es transformador y de esta manera podemos contar o revivir nuestras historias de manera menos dolorosa, con un propósito y y ese propósito es contribuir a la no repetición. Con estas actividades hacemos memoria no únicamente individual sino también colectiva que nos fortalece y nos permite soñar con un país mejor.

In these ways, the women participants highlighted what they felt were the benefits of taking part in such artistic activities (sound, weaving, drawing, creating plaster models, photographs, and video), including sharing their experiences through the production of art

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[4] Transcreation is a notion derived from translation studies which has been adopted by creative practices, proposed as one of the dimensions in the methodological framework to translate digital textualities in works of electronic literature. Thus, «one of the meanings of transcreation is that translation is a recreation based on the compositional principles of the original text» (Mencía, Pold and Portela, 2020, p. 5).

[5] In the creation of a *taller de devolución*, we were inspired by practices undertaken by the RPM themselves; in Elvira Sánchez-Blake's description of the process of the RPM in taking the testimony of the close to 1,000 victims, she describes the importance of subsequent *talleres de devolución* which were conceived of as «como lugares de encuentro, con un tiempo destinado a reflexionar con espacios creativos de distensión, sanación y autocuidado» (Sánchez-Blake, 2016, p. 311).

[6] Response from participant to feedback questionnaire. To maintain anonymity, participant names here and throughout the article have been replaced by a code.

practices to transform feelings of pain and grief.

CONCLUSION

As can be seen from the above, this project has attempted to bring together in a productive dialogue a series of recent debates, these comprising: critiques of victimhood, and the need for greater agency in the representation of victims; calls from within digital humanities for its widening out and greater engagement with societal issues; and discussions about the potentials of digital technologies and co-creation. Through processes of co-creation, and informed by an open design approach, the research team has attempted to generate ways in which the women participants become active co-creators rather than passive figures who are represented by others. Moreover, the status of the digital artwork as ongoing and as deliberately unresolved means that the artwork itself continues to grow and change over time, responding to participant input, and thus resulting in a more dynamic and open-ended representation.

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